AVATAR

The Last Airbender

Show #204

BOOK TWO: EARTH
CHAPTER FOUR: "The Swamp"

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ACT ONE

EXT. MARKETPLACE - DAY

Uncle and Zuko sit in a busy marketplace filled with people from the Fire and Earth Nations. They wear inconspicuous, battered clothes that make them look like just two of the many people dispossessed by the war, and Zuko has a hood that disguises his scar. Their ostrich horse is tied up nearby.

As people pass by, Uncle begs for change, rattling coins around in a hat.

UNCLE
Spare coins for weary travelers?

A few PASSERSBY toss him coins. Zuko scowls.

ZUKO
This is humiliating. We're royalty. These people should be giving us whatever we want.

Uncle smiles.

UNCLE
They will, if you ask nicely.

A YOUNG LADY walks by.

UNCLE
Spare change for a hungry old man?

He gives her a puppy-dog look and pats his stomach. She smiles.

YOUNG LADY
Aww. Here you go.

She throws a coin in his hat.

UNCLE
The coin is appreciated, but not as much as your smile.

She giggles and walks off. Zuko looks even more embarrassed. A MAN (with a long beard with a red ribbon tied around it keeping it neat) wearing two broadswords (the type favored by the Blue Spirit in Episode 113) on his back, stops in front of them.

BROADSWORD MAN
How about some entertainment in exchange for... a gold piece?

He flashes a shiny gold coin. Uncle’s eyes widen.

ZUKO
(seething)
We’re not performers.

UNCLE
Not professional, anyway.
(stands up and sings)
It’s a long, long way/ to Ba Sing Se/ but the girls in the city/ they look so pretty/

The swordsman grins.

BROADSWORD MAN
Come on, we’re talking a gold piece here. Let’s see some action!

He whips his swords out of their sheaths.

BROADSWORD MAN
Dance!

He swings the swords at Uncle’s feet. Zuko is furious inside, barely restraining himself from stopping this display. Uncle hops and kicks over the swords spiritedly as he continues his song.

UNCLE
they kiss so sweet/ that you’ve really got to meet/ the girls from Ba Sing Se!

The swordsman swings his swords a few more times and laughs.

BROADSWORD MAN
(LAUGHS) Nothing like a fat man dancing for his dinner. Here you go.

He tosses the coin in Uncle’s hat, sheathes his swords, and walks off. Uncle grins at Zuko.

UNCLE
Such a kind man.

Zuko’s eyes are wild with humiliation. He shakes his head in disgust and glares as the swordsman walks away.

FADE OUT:

FADE IN:

EXT. SKY - DAY

Sokka, Katara, and Aang fly on Appa over a vast swampy forest. Appa (Aang at the reins) starts to descend. (NOTE: we should not see Aang intentionally guiding Appa down.) Sokka notices they're dropping altitude.

SOKKA
Hey, you taking us down for a reason?

Aang stares ahead in a reverie. Sokka taps his shoulder.

SOKKA
Aang -- why are we going down?

AANG
(snapping out of it)
What? I didn't even notice.

Appa continues descending.

SOKKA
Are you noticing now?

Katara looks at Aang and sees his confused look.

KATARA
Is something wrong?

AANG
I know this is gonna sound weird, but I think the swamp is calling to me.

Momo cocks his head to listen.

SOKKA
Is it telling you where we can get something to eat?

AANG
No, I -- I think it wants us to land there.

Sokka and Katara both look down. From the air, it looks like an impenetrable mass of branches and vines, with mist and an occasional flash of water shining through.

SOKKA
No offense to the swamp, but I don't see any land there to land <u>on</u>.

Aang starts guiding Appa downward, closer to the treetops.

AANG
I don’t know. Bumi said to learn Earthbending I would have to wait and listen. And now I’m actually hearing the Earth. Do you want me to ignore it?

SOKKA
Yes.

Katara looks down at the swamp. The closer they get, the scarier it looks.

KATARA
I don’t know. There’s something ominous about that place.

APPA
(NERVOUS BELLOW)

MOMO
(SCARED CHITTERING)

SOKKA
See? Even Appa and Momo don’t like it here.

Aang nods, resigned.

AANG
Okay, since everyone feels so strongly about this... Bye, swamp.
(pulling up on the reins)
Yip yip!

Appa starts gaining altitude again. As he does, the sky starts growing dark, taking on a sickening green tint. A ROARING SOUND emanates from behind them. The kids look behind them and see a funnel cloud rising out of the swamp, heading right for them.

SOKKA
You better throw in an extra “yip”! We gotta move!

Appa takes off faster, but the funnel cloud gains on them, and soon they’re caught in the heart of a fierce tornado. Everyone hangs on tight as Appa is flung round and round. Aang Airbends a protective sphere around them -- inside the air is calm.

But the force of the storm bashes the sides of the sphere, making it smaller and smaller. Aang grits his teeth, trying to sustain the sphere, but he can’t.

Finally the sphere disappears, and the centrifugal force and wind swing Katara overboard. Sokka manages to grab her before she falls away, but as he does, he too is sucked off Appa's back. As they plummet toward the earth, Aang leaps off Appa with his glider and manages to reach them before they hit the ground. However, their weight and the storm's strong winds drive them down, and they crash through the swamp trees' canopy and into the swamp itself.

EXT. SWAMP - SAME

The kids, dazed from their crash and soaked from landing in a marshy puddle, pick themselves up. Aang checks to see if everyone is all right, then looks up to the sky, which is mostly blocked with tree branches and vines.

AANG
Where’s Appa and Momo?!

He leaps up through the trees, winding his way through until he emerges-

EXT. SKY - SAME

The sky is now crystal clear, and he spreads his glider and flies around, scouting for Appa and Momo.

AANG
Appa. Momo.

There’s no sign of them in the air, and the canopy is just as impenetrable as ever, making spotting anything on the ground impossible. With a frustrated look, he heads back to Sokka and Katara.

EXT. SWAMP - SAME

Sokka and Katara stand in the swamp, still soaked and muddy.

The ground is soggy, and any land that isn't totally submerged is covered with roots and vines that make walking next to impossible.

KATARA
Sokka, you’ve got an elbow-leech.

We see Sokka has a large, slimy leech attached to his elbow -- he starts panicking, patting himself down frantically.

SOKKA
Where, where?!

KATARA
Where do you think?

Sokka pulls it off with a sucking pop.

SOKKA
Why do things keep attaching to me?

Aang lands near them.

KATARA
You couldn’t find them?

AANG
No. And the tornado... it just disappeared.

They look around at the misty, spooky swamp. It's impossible to see too far ahead because of the thick foliage, hanging vines, and thick mist.

EXT. SWAMP - TREETOPS - DAY

Appa is lodged in some tree branches high above the ground. He’s totally tangled up in vines, and he squirms to get out of them, but the more he squirms around, the more he gets tangled.

MOMO
(ANGRY CHITTERING)

Appa stops squirming, and Momo starts chewing through the vines, spitting out pieces as he goes. We can tell from his look that they’re not very tasty. As he chews through one, Appa lists to his side, then rips through the canopy and crashes on the ground, with Momo landing on top of him.

Appa rights himself and looks up at the sky with grim determination.

APPA
(DETERMINED BELLOW)

Appa gets low, then launches himself back up, trying to break through the trees. But before he makes it out, he’s stuck in the branches and vines again.

MOMO
(ANGRY CHITTERING)

APPA
(SAD BELLOW)

Momo flies up to Appa and start chewing through the vines again.

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

The kids make their way through the swamp, slowly picking their way through the vines and branches.

Just then, they get caught in a tangle of vines. Katara and Aang try to pick their way through it. We hear a scary CATGATOR HISS, and a large creature slithers nearby in the water.

SOKKA
We better speed things up.

He pulls out a machete (season 2 gear!) and starts HACKING wildly at the foliage, first helping to free Katara and Aang, then clearing a path. Aang grabs him.

AANG
Maybe we should be a little nicer to the swamp.

SOKKA
Aang, these are just plants. Do you want me to say “please” and “thank you” as I swing my machete back and forth?

Katara looks around at the swamp.

KATARA
Maybe you should listen to Aang. Something about this place feels... alive.

SOKKA
I’m sure there are lots of things that are alive here, and if we don’t want to end up getting eaten by them, we need to find Appa as fast as we can.

He starts hacking through again, and Aang and Katara follow. As they stomp through the swamp we SHIFT TO-

POV ON THE KIDS

It's a creepy, handheld horror movie shot, and man is it scary. Someone, or some thing, is watching them, following them. Sokka keeps hacking through.

EXT. SWAMP - LATER

Appa and Momo walk through the swamp, looking for the kids. It's starting to get dark. Appa starts to go in one direction, but Momo wants to go the other way. Momo tugs on Appa's reins to try to get him to follow.

MOMO
(STRAINED CHITTERING)

Appa ignores him and just drags Momo along. Momo drops the reins and hops up on Appa and goes through Aang's bag, which is still stuck in the saddle. He pulls out the bison whistle, hops down, and starts blowing it.

We get a CLOSE UP of Appa’s face and hear the whistle’s LOUD SCREECHING in his head. He shakes his head.

APPA
(PAINED BELLOW)

Appa turns around and gently takes the whistle away from Momo with his teeth. He then yawns and slumps down, tired and ready for sleep.

MOMO
(ANGRY CHITTERING)

Momo flies off on his own. A long beat. Momo flies back and lies down next to Appa to rest... curling up and cuddling up with him.

EXT. SWAMP - NIGHT

The darkness and mist make it impossible for the kids to see anything as they continue to slog through the swamp. All manner of nighttime swamp creatures, bugs, frogs, etc., sing and screech loudly.

KATARA
Appa! Momo!

Sokka slumps down the ground.

SOKKA
There’s no way they can hear us, and no way we can see them. We’ll have to make camp for the night.

Off in the distance, a glowing orb of swamp gas rises up and floats away. Katara watches it, spooked.

KATARA
What was that?

SOKKA
Nothing. Just swamp gas. Look, there’s nothing supernatural going on here.

Suddenly, from above them, they hear screaming like someone getting tortured.

BIRD
(BLOOD-CURDLING SCREAM)

They look up and see the screaming bird, which leaps out of its roost and flies away.

SOKKA
(rattled)
I think we should build a fire.

He gets up and starts hacking limbs off of trees.

AANG
Sokka, the longer we’re here, the more I think you shouldn’t be doing that.

SOKKA
(over his shoulder)
No, I asked the swamp. It said this was fine. Right, swamp?
(falsetto)
No problem, Sokka!

He keeps hacking. Aang is not amused.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SWAMP - LATER

The tiny fire Sokka has built offers little comfort, and the kids huddle around it nervously. No one can sleep. Katara looks off into the darkness.

KATARA
Does anyone else get the feeling that we’re being watched?

SOKKA
Please. We’re all alone out here.

Sokka brushes at a tiny bug that slowly buzzes around their heads. Suddenly, the bug’s abdomen gives off a blinding light. The kids have to shield their eyes from it, and all around them, hundreds of swamp animals’ eyes shine with the reflected light, all of them staring right at the kids. The little bug turns its light off and buzzes away.

AANG
Except for them.

SOKKA
Right. Except for them.

Everyone is more rattled than ever.

EXT. NIGHT - SWAMP

The same NIGHTTIME NOISES surround Appa and Momo, and while Appa sleeps soundly, Momo runs back and forth on his back, looking around at every sound.

MOMO
(SCARED CHITTERING)

Finally his nervous fidgeting gets to Appa, who raises his giant head.

APPA
(TREMENDOUS ROAR)

Everything in the swamp goes SILENT. Appa lays his head back down, and Momo closes his eyes and relaxes. Then a single cricket CHIRPS, and Momo’s eyes pop open wide again.

EXT. SWAMP - NIGHT

The kids have all fallen asleep, and their fire starts to flicker and die. We SHIFT TO-

POV ON THE KIDS

The creepy watcher is back, and as the fire finally goes out, we see the vines around the campsite start to move. One viney tentacle slowly wraps itself around Sokka's leg.

END ACT ONE

ACT TWO

EXT. KIDS' CAMPSITE - NIGHT

[NOTE: The following sequence should be STYLIZED -- perhaps "Blair Witchy" -- with close, shaky, somewhat chaotic and confusing shots that reflect the scary situation itself. i.e, we are not revealing too much at this stage.]

Sokka tries to roll over in his sleep, and his inability to move wakes him up. He finds himself totally entangled in living, moving vines.

SOKKA
(ALARMED SHOUT)

Sokka's scream wakes the others, who are also completely ensnared by vines that are actively trying to tie them up. Everyone tries to jump up, falls back down, rolls around and bumbles about. The camp quickly descends into chaos, and no one can see where anyone else is because of the thick mist that covers everything. But they can hear-

SWAMP MONSTER
(GROANING? GROWLING? GURGLING?)

The kids can't tell what's making the noise, but it's scary. It seems like the swamp has come alive and turned against them. Sokka grabs his machete and starts hacking at the vines. Some more vines wrap around his wrist, holding his knife at bay, but he manages to wriggle free and starts running away, although he can't see where.

Katara Waterbends an icy whip to clear a hole in the vines, keeping them at bay. They snap at her like angry snakes, trying to take hold of her, but she manages to break each one that wraps around her. But the vines are tenacious, and she retreats, stumbling blindly off into the darkness.

Aang uses Airbending to blow the vines back away from him, then leaps up into a tree, jumping from limb to limb as every vine he nears comes to life and tries to grab him. One vine grabs his arm, and he pushes off the tree, using the enemy vine to swing him away, and Airbending it off when he reaches another tree. He scampers down the tree and runs.

Aang finally finds himself out of the "living" area of the swamp. He stops and catches his breath, looking around. Dawn starts to break. The sun peeks through the leaves a bit, catching on the mist.

We WIDEN OUT as Aang looks around. No sign of the campsite, Sokka, or Katara.

AANG
Guys?

He's alone. They've been separated.

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

CLOSE UP on a huge Appa track in the mud. As we PULL BACK, we see a couple of strange SWAMP FOLK standing around looking at it. One of them, DUE, turns to his partner, THO. (NOTE: These are actual Vietnamese names, and therefore worthy of Avatar use.)

DUE
What d'you reckon'd make a track like that, Tho?

Tho looks around and sees more tracks.

THO
Don't know, Due. Sumpin' with six legs. Pretty biggun's, too.

Due looks off into the brush.

DUE
Leaves a nice wide trail to follow.

THO
You know what's at the end of that trail?

Due shakes his head. Tho smiles. He's missing a few teeth.

THO
Dinner.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Appa and Momo drift down a river that runs through the swamp. Momo jumps off Appa's back to hop on some logs, chasing after a bug. He leaps from log to log, finally diving into the river after his meal. But the last log he hopped off of starts to drift after him, and we see a pair of eyes emerge from the water, watching him.

It's not a log at all - it's a CATGATOR, a disgusting cross between a giant catfish and an alligator. The catgator comes swimming after Momo, who sees it approaching and starts flapping awkwardly away like a wounded duck trying to take off. The catgator has his eyes on the prize, so he doesn't notice that Momo is heading right for Appa.

Momo manages to hop up on Appa's head just as the catgator is about to snap him up. Appa opens his wide mouth and sucks the catgator in, leaving only his tail wiggling out of Appa's mouth. After a moment, Appa spits the catgator out, and he quickly swims away.

CATGATOR
(ANGRY, CATLIKE YOWL)

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

Katara wanders through the swamp, alone.

KATARA
Aang? Sokka?

No answer. She sighs. We can tell she's scared, frustrated, and totally lost. But up ahead of her the mist clears for a moment, and she sees what she thinks is a woman's back.

KATARA
Hello?

The woman doesn't answer, and Katara cautiously heads in her direction.

KATARA
Hello? Can you help me?

As Katara gets closer, she realizes who the woman is. Katara stops in her tracks, shocked.

KATARA
Mom?

The woman still doesn't answer, and Katara runs toward her.

KATARA
Mom!

She sprints to the woman, a look of wild anticipation and joy on her face. She finally reaches the woman and puts her hand on the woman's shoulder.

KATARA
I can't believe-

As she puts down her hand, the mist clears away, and she realizes that her hand is resting on a stump. [NOTE: Stump should be designed so that it suggests the figure Katara saw.] Katara takes a slow step back and looks around. She's still completely alone. A wave of frustration comes over her, and she slumps to the ground and breaks down in tears.

KATARA
(SOBBING)

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

Sokka angrily stomps through the swamp, haphazardly hacking his way through the foliage, as much out of frustration as any desire to clear a path.

SOKKA
(shouting)
Aang!
(muttering to himself)
Stupid swamp. Dumb ugly vines.
(back to shouting)
Katara!

He gets entangled in a viney, briary mess and starts flipping out, swinging his machete.

SOKKA
You think you're so tough?! Huh?!

He finally breaks through the bramble and falls to his knees, breathing heavily.

A low sound, just a whisper, makes him look up. The sound comes again, and a confused look crosses Sokka's face. It's probably just the wind through the trees, but it does almost sound like someone's calling his name. Not quite believing it, Sokka answers.

SOKKA
Hello?

Up ahead in the mist, a shaft of light pokes through. Sokka slowly stands and walks toward it, transfixed. Inside the shaft of light is the ghostly figure of Yue. Sokka stares, unbelieving, and walks toward the figure.

SOKKA
Yue.

He looks around to see if anyone is watching him, slowly getting closer and closer to the figure.

SOKKA
This is just a trick of the light.
Swamp gas. I hit my head running
away last night. I'm going crazy.

But he keeps walking, and Yue stays right where she is. She gives him a sad look.

YUE
You didn’t protect me.

This is too much for Sokka to bear and he rubs his eyes, trying to get her out of his head. When he opens his eyes again, she’s gone.

SOKKA
(SIGH OF RELIEF)

He slowly turns around to find Yue right in front of him! Startled, he stumbles backward into a puddle of water. When he looks up again, she's gone.

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

Aang moves through the swamp, looking for his friends. Unlike Sokka, Aang moves quickly, weaving through the vines and branches with little difficulty.

AANG
Katara! Appa!

He comes to an area with a little hill, and as he looks at the top, he thinks he sees a figure in a fancy dress, but she is hidden in mist and Aang can’t be sure. (NOTE: The figure is Toph, although we never get a very good look at her.)

AANG
Hello?

The figure doesn’t answer.

AANG
Who are you?

Aang scrambles up the muddy hillside, but before he can make it to the top, the ground gives way beneath him and he tumbles back down to the bottom, covered in earth.

Aang looks up at the top of the hill. Toph is now standing next to a winged boar (a pigasus!). He hears what sounds like-

MYSTERIOUS VOICE
(GIRL’S LAUGHTER)

Toph jumps on to the winged boar’s back and they fly away into the mist.

AANG
Hey! Come back!

Aang leaps up to follow. He bounds up the hill, but when he gets to the top, the girl and boar are gone. Then, in the distance-

MYSTERIOUS VOICE
(GIRL'S LAUGHTER)

Aang chases after the sound, picking up speed and becoming more and more at one with the swamp. He starts swinging through the trees like an Airbending Tarzan, following the laughter. Occasionally he'll see a flash of the girl on the boar. The vines and branches flash by as Aang pursues the mysterious girl and her strange companion.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

Appa and Momo continue floating down the river. As they wind around a bend, they see Due and Tho, as well as some other SWAMP FOLK, waiting for them on some thin skiffs. The animals stop, waiting to see what kind of people these are. When the swamp folk get a look at Appa, their eyes go wide.

DUE
Lookey there, Tho! Is that a little hairy feller ridin' that thing?

THO
Naw, that's what they call a lee-moo. Saw one at a travelin' show once. Real smart, they say.

DUE
Bet he tastes a lot like possum-chicken.

THO
You think everything tastes like possum-chicken.

Appa and Momo float closer to the swamp folk, a little apprehensive. Due stands up on his skiff and pulls out a giant net.

DUE
(coaxing Appa)
Come on now, fellas. Just a little closer. Nice and easy. Nothin' to worry about, we're just fixin' to eat you.

Appa and Momo sense danger and Appa turns around and takes off.

Appa can’t fly too high because of the low-hanging branches that enclose the river, so he just barely clears the water and zips away.

Tho looks at Due, incensed.

THO
What’d you say that fer?

DUE
Well, we are!

THO
But you don’t have to tell them that!

DUE
Well, how’d I know they’d understand me?

THO
Come on!

They start pushing their skiffs forward, and we see for the first time that the swamp folk are Waterbenders. They use long poles to guide their skiffs and Waterbending to propel them forward. Soon they’re right on Appa’s tail and a high-speed chase is on. Appa skims the water and banks around the river bend.

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

Aang continues chasing Toph through the trees. Once again he hears the-

MYSTERIOUS VOICE
(GIRL’S LAUGHTER)

-and this time when he hears it, he sees the girl’s figure and she’s not running away.

AANG
(to himself)
Who are you?

He rockets through the trees, heading straight for the girl. As he’s almost there, she turns around and we see that it’s Katara.

KATARA
(SCREAM)

Aang can’t stop himself, and he plows right into her. And then they both plow into Sokka. They all hit the ground.

SOKKA
(SCREAM)

It takes them all a moment to realize that they've found each other.

SOKKA
What do you guys think you're doing? I've been looking all over for you!

KATARA
Well I've been wandering around looking for you!

Aang gets a sheepish grin.

AANG
I was chasing some girl.

They look at him, confused.

KATARA
What girl?

Aang shrugs.

AANG
I don't know. I heard laughing, and I saw some girl in a fancy dress.

Sokka nods sarcastically.

SOKKA
Well, there must be a tea party here and we just didn't get our invitations.

Katara gets a concerned look on her face.

KATARA
I thought I saw Mom.

Sokka looks at her, a little freaked out. Aang nods. Sokka regains his composure and shakes his head, refusing to believe.

SOKKA
Look, we were all just scared and hungry and our minds were playing tricks on us. That's why we all saw things out here.

Aang and Katara turn on him.

KATARA
You saw something, too?

Sokka looks away, embarrassed.

SOKKA
I thought I saw Yue.
(covering quickly)
But that doesn't prove anything! Look, I think about her all the time!
(to Katara)
And you saw Mom, someone you miss a lot.

AANG
What about me? I didn't know the girl I saw.
(beat)
And all our visions led us right here.

KATARA
Okay, so where's here? The middle of the swamp?

Aang looks around and for the first time notices-

AANG
Yeah. The center.

He points behind them and they look at what must be the biggest tree in the Avatar universe. A huge trunk with old, gnarled roots, and branches that spread wide and then dive down, becoming whole new massive trees.

AANG
It's the heart of the swamp. It's been calling us here. I knew it.

Sokka shakes his head, still refusing to believe.

SOKKA
It's just a tree. It can't call anyone. For the last time, there's nothing's after us, and there's nothing magical happening here.

Just then they hear a rustling noise behind them. They turn around to find themselves confronted by a terrifying, vine-covered swamp monster!

END ACT TWO

ACT THREE

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

The kids face the swamp monster, who lumbers toward them, the vines that cover him twitching like green tentacles.

SWAMP MONSTER
(TERRIFYING HOWLING -- AND GURGLING)

The vines lash out at Sokka, wrapping around him and pulling him toward the swamp monster. Aang punches at the monster with an Airbending blast, knocking him back and loosening his grip on Sokka.

Sokka pulls out his machete and hacks off the remaining vines around him. But the branches on the trees around the kids start to bend down at them, and more vines snake down from above, grabbing at the kids from all angles.

Katara Waterbends some swampy water up at the attacking branches, knocking them away from her. Then she uses the same water to lash out and whip the swamp monster. Aang dodges the branches, then drops to the ground and does a huge Airbending move at the monster, knocking him off balance momentarily, but he quickly stabilizes, his roots adjusting to take a firmer grip.

The monster bends forward and thrusts his hands down into the earth. Roots grow out of the ground around Sokka’s feet, and they’re too thick for him to hack through with his machete. The monster stands up again, leaving Sokka bound in his root prison. Aang and Katara both bend at him, hitting him hard in the chest, but the monster’s feet sink down in the ground, and he takes the blast full on, just bending back like a palm tree in a storm.

Meanwhile, the roots around Sokka continue to grow, and vines start climbing up around him, totally encompassing him and choking him.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The Swamp Folk are gaining on Appa and Momo, who continue whipping down the river. They round a bend and one of the swamp boats loses control and hits a log, launching into the air a la “Dukes of Hazzard”, winding up in the trees.

But the rest of the boats keep coming. Momo starts pulling things out of the bags on Appa's back and throwing them at the boats. A shirt hits Due in the face. He peels it off his face and looks at it, confused.

DUE
Now what would a lee-moo need a shirt for?

While Momo keeps throwing things at the swamp folk, Appa ducks under a low-hanging branch, knocking Momo off his back and into the river. The swamp boats speed by and Tho scoops Momo up and puts him in a bag, still pursuing Appa.

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

The kids continue their battle against the swamp monster. Katara Waterbends some ice on the vines around Sokka, which makes them brittle and he manages to bust out of them.

She and Aang both Waterbend at the monster, freezing its vines and whipping them away, making it look like they're tearing it apart. As the greenery falls away from the monster, a man is exposed piece by piece from underneath. Aang stops attacking when he notices the man inside.

SOKKA
There’s someone in there. He’s bending the vines!

The swamp monster continues his battle, but as his vines are ripped away, he has less and less with which to work. Aang finally yells at him.

AANG
Why did you call me here if you just wanted to kill us?!

The swamp monster suddenly stops fighting.

SWAMP MONSTER
Wait! I didn’t call you here.

Everyone stands for a beat, confused and worn out from the fighting. Aang finally steps forward.

AANG
We were flying over and I heard something calling to me, telling me to land.

SOKKA
He’s the Avatar. Stuff like that happens to us a lot.

The vines and branches that remain covering the swamp monster retreat away from him returning back into the ground, revealing a STRANGE HERMIT.

SWAMP MONSTER
The Avatar!? Come with me.

He walks off toward the giant tree. The kids share a confused look, then follow.

KATARA
So who are you, then?

SWAMP MONSTER
I protect the swamp from folks that want to hurt it.
(pointing at Sokka)
Like this fella with his big knife.

Sokka nods, not offended at all.

SOKKA
See? Completely reasonable. Not a monster -- just a regular guy defending his home. Nothing mystical about it.

Katara gives him a tired look, but the swamp monster shakes his head.

SWAMP MONSTER
Oh, the swamp is a mystical place, all right. It’s sacred.

He pats the giant tree.

SWAMP MONSTER
I reached enlightenment right here under the banyangrove tree. I heard it calling me, just like you did.

Sokka nods, still skeptical.

SOKKA
Sure you did. It seems real chatty.

The swamp monster ignores him.

SWAMP MONSTER
See, this whole swamp is actually just one tree, spread out over miles.

COOL SHOT

We see a cool shot of the tree spreading throughout the entire forest under the swamp monster's voice over.

SWAMP MONSTER (V.O.)
Branches spread, then sink and take root, then spread some more. One big living organism. Just like the entire world.

BACK TO SCENE

Aang looks up at the tree, then around at the swamp.

AANG
I get how the tree is one big thing, but the whole world?

SWAMP MONSTER
Sure. You think you're any different from me, or your friends, or this tree? If you listen hard enough, you can hear every living thing breathing together, you can feel everything growing. We're all living together, even if most folks don't act like it.
(beat, then dramatically)
We all have the same roots, and we are all branches of the same tree.

KATARA
But what did our visions mean?

SWAMP MONSTER
In the swamp we see visions of people we've lost, people we loved... folks we think are gone. But the swamp tells us they're not. We're still connected to them. Time is an illusion and so is death.

The kids all look awed and confused.

AANG
But what about my vision? It was someone I had never met.

SWAMP MONSTER
(shrugs)
You're the Avatar, you tell me

AANG
(beat as he realizes)
Time is an illusion -- so it’s someone I will meet?

Sokka butts in.

SOKKA
Sorry to interrupt the lesson, but we still need to find Appa and Momo.

AANG
I think I know how to find them.

He turns to the giant tree and walks into a hollow created by the roots and branches.

AANG
(to himself)
Everything is connected.

Aang touches a root, and the tattoo on his hand glows... the glow spread through the roots and begins moving outward through the swamp.

CUT TO:

POV OF AANG’S VISION

It’s like Aang has sunk into the root and is shooting through the swamp floor. He zips along the root superhighway and ends up by the river, where Aang sees the Swamp Folk throwing a net around Appa. With Appa captured, they start dragging their catch along behind their boats. We-

CUT BACK TO:

EXT. SWAMP - DAY

Aang lets go of the root and his tattoo stops glowing.

AANG
Come on, we’ve gotta hurry.

He starts running, and the kids and the swamp monster hustle off after Aang.

EXT. RIVER - DAY

The Swamp Folk happily tow Appa in a net behind their boats, singing some swampy songs.

THO
Set my lines by the river bed/ caught ten fish and I killed ‘em dead/ cut ‘em and gut ‘em and I toss the heads/ in the water to keep them catgators fed!

One of their boats suddenly gets blown off on the shore and the swamp folk turn to see Aang.

AANG
Appa!

Aang leaps over to where Appa is and frees him from his net. From inside his sack, Momo cries out.

MOMO
(EXCITED CHITTERING)

Aang sends an airblast at the guy holding Momo’s sack and knocks him into the water. Momo is free! By this time Katara, Sokka and the swamp monster arrive at the scene.

DUE
We’re under attack!

There is a brief fight where the swamp folk are using Waterbending against Katara and Aang. At one point, both Katara and the swamp folk are trying to bend the same wave at each other -- at which point Katara realizes...

KATARA
Hey, you guys are Waterbenders.

DUE
You too! That means we’re kin.

Then the swamp folk notice the swamp monster.

DUE
Hey, Huu. How you been?

SWAMP MONSTER
You know, scared some folks, swung some vines... the usual.

The swamp monster smiles and waves. Sokka looks over at him.

SOKKA
Huu?

EXT. SWAMP FOLK CAMP - NIGHT

Appa and Momo have been set free, and the kids, Huu, and the swamp folk are having a barbecue. The swamp folk hand out some fish, possum-chickens, and giant bugs they've roasted. Aang tosses his bug to Momo, who happily digs in. Sokka gnaws on a possum-chicken.

DUE
How you like that possum-chicken?

SOKKA
Tastes just like Arctic hen. So why were you guys so interested in eating Appa? You've got plenty of those big things wandering around.

He points to a nearby catgator. Due looks at him like he's crazy.

DUE
You want me to eat old Slim? He's like a member of the family.

He tosses a fish to Slim, who snaps it up hungrily and makes a purring sound. Sokka pulls a big roasted bug out of his bowl and tosses it to Slim.

SOKKA
Nice Slim.

Slim hisses at him angrily. Due laughs.

DUE
Oh, he don't eat no bugs. That's people food.

Katara helps some swamp folk who are doing the cooking to bend some water from a large barrel into a pot. Tho watches her, curiously.

THO
Where you say you was from?

KATARA
The South Pole.

THO
Didn't know they was Waterbenders anywhere but here. They got a nice swamp there, do they?

KATARA
No, it’s all ice and snow.

Tho nods.

THO
No wonder you left.

Sokka looks over at Katara.

SOKKA
Well, I hope you realize now that nothing strange was going on here, just a bunch of greasy people living in a swamp.

KATARA
(incredulous)
What about the visions?

SOKKA
I told you, we were hungry.
(holding up a bug as evidence)
I’m eating a giant bug!

AANG
But what about when the tree showed me where Appa and Momo were?

Sokka shrugs.

SOKKA
That’s Avatar stuff. That doesn’t count.
(he turns to Huu)
The only thing I can’t figure out is how you made the tornado that sucked us down.

Swamp monster/Huu shakes his head.

SWAMP MONSTER
I can’t do anything like that. I just bend the water in the plants.

Sokka shrugs.

SOKKA
Well, no accounting for weather. Still, there’s absolutely nothing mysterious about the swamp.

He folds his arms and smiles smugly. We TRUCK OUT beyond them, into the swamp, where some vines crawl around on the ground of their own accord.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. ALLEYWAY - DAY

The man who made Uncle dance with his broadswords walks down an empty alleyway. He hears a noise behind him, maybe someone walking up behind him, and he whirls around. Nothing. The alley is completely empty.

He heads for a doorway in the alley, checks over his shoulders a couple of times, and heads through the door.

INT. STORAGE WAREHOUSE - CONTINUOUS

It’s dark. We can hardly see anything in here. There's the faint sound of something moving around somewhere in the room.

BROADSWORD MAN
Who’s there?

Then we hear the sound of a quick attack, and someone hits the floor.

The door to the warehouse opens again, and the light from the alleyway silhouettes Zuko, who wears a blue bandanna that covers his eyes like a Zorro mask. Zuko twirls the twin broadswords that used to belong to the man, sheaths them behind him, and darts out of the room.

FADE TO BLACK.

THE END